INTRODUCTION

COURSE AIMS

The course introduces students to the language, literature and culture of Poland through language instruction and a broad survey of Polish literary, cultural and political history.

The paper will pay close attention to the hybridized and multi-ethnic nature of Poland’s past, pointing to the interlocking cultural narratives of a broader region laced with shifting borders. There will be a strong focus on often painful international relations – especially with Russia – and on comparative perspectives that place Poland in a much larger, pan-European context.

Weekly lectures and fortnightly supervisions will cover the history of Polish culture from before the symbolic beginnings of 966 until the present day. Students will encounter a wide range of cultural productions, including novels, poems, plays, short stories, memoirs, historical studies, films, musical compositions and works of visual art. Throughout the paper, the powerful influence of historical experience on national culture will remain a central concern.

Students will learn the basics of the Polish language in twice-weekly classes throughout the academic year. No prior experience is required.

The second half of the paper will feature an increasing emphasis on the challenges and techniques of creative translation. By the end of the paper, students will be able to complete short literary translation assignments from Polish into English.

PREPARATORY READING

Before the beginning of the academic year, students should read either Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland’s Present by Norman Davies or Poland: A History by Adam Zamoyski for a general overview of Polish history. Students should also familiarize themselves with the first two units of the Polish language textbook, Colloquial Polish: The Complete Course for Beginners (2011).

COURSE STRUCTURE

The course consists of five elements: lectures, seminars, supervisions, language classes and reading.

Lectures: The course will include sixteen lectures, eight in Michaelmas and eight in Lent. The lectures provide an introduction to and overview of the course.
Seminars: There will be two revision seminars in Easter term.
Supervisions: Students will have ten supervisions: four in Michaelmas, four in Lent and two in Easter.
**Language classes:** Students will attend two language classes weekly, commencing from absolute beginner level. Lessons will strongly focus on practical elements of spoken and written communication.

**Reading:** The course will include various materials, including films and musical works, but the vast majority of sources will be textual. Students will read novels, poems, plays, short stories, hip hop lyrics, memoirs and historical studies. Certain texts will be obligatory, but students will also be able to choose particular areas of interest for more focused study.

**USING THE HANDBOOK**

The handbook is divided into four sections:

Section 1: Exam  
Section 2: Lectures and Seminars  
Section 3: Supervisions  
Section 4: Reading
SECTION 1: THE EXAM

DESCRIPTION
The exam paper is divided into three sections, and you must answer one question from each section. All questions have equal weight.

Section A is a translation task. You will translate a short literary passage (approx. 250 words) from Polish into English.

Section B has six questions, of which you must choose one. The questions will cover topics from the first half of the course.

Section C has six questions, of which you must choose one. The questions will cover topics from the second half of the course.

PREPARING FOR THE EXAM

Section A: You will have plenty of opportunities to work on translation tasks throughout the paper – in seminars, supervisions and language lessons.

Sections B and C: The general format of the exam questions will be similar to the essay questions posed for supervisions, which will consequently form a key part of your exam preparation.
SECTION TWO: LECTURES AND SEMINARS

All lectures last fifty minutes. Please check with the departmental secretary for times and venues.

MICHAELMAS

1. Introduction: Poland, Past and Present
2. Pagan Origins to the Beginnings of Polish Literary Culture
3. The Golden Age: The Polish Renaissance
4. Sarmatian Culture: Counter-Reformation and the Baroque
5. Enlightenment and the End of Independence
6. Uprising and Romanticism
7. Positivism and Social Critique
8. “Young Poland” at the Turn of the Century

LENT

9. Independence between the Wars: The Second Polish Republic
10. Into the Abyss: The Second World War
11. Stalinist Poland
12. The Solidarity Revolution
13. Independence Regained
14. Culture Wars: Redefining Polishness
15. Jews in Polish Culture
16. The Future of Poland

EASTER

17. Revision Seminar 1.
18. Revision Seminar 2.
SECTION 3: SUPERVISES

Essay preparation: Aim at five or six double-spaced pages; research using the general and topic-related reading in the reading lists; cite quotations (in Polish wherever possible) by footnoting; end with a full bibliography. Please send me your essays at least 48 hours before the scheduled supervision.

Supervisions will take place in RFB 344.

MICHAELMAS

1. Essay supervision
Choose a question from topic 1 of the Michaelmas list.
2. Essay supervision
Choose a question from topic 2 of the Michaelmas list.
3. Essay supervision
Choose a question from topic 3 of the Michaelmas list.
4. Essay supervision
Choose a question from topic 4 on the Michaelmas list.

LENT

5. Essay supervision
Choose a question from topic 5 of the Lent list.
6. Essay supervision
Choose a question from topic 6 of the Lent list.
7. Essay supervision
Choose a question from topic 7 of the Lent list.
8. Essay supervision
Choose a question from topic 8 of the Lent list.

EASTER

9. Essay supervision
Revision questions for exam preparation.
10. Essay supervision
Revision questions for exam preparation.
MICHAELMAS LIST

Topic 1: Pagan Pre-History to the Middle Ages
1. Discuss some continuities and ruptures between the pagan “pre-history” of the Polish lands and the post-966 Christian Polish state.
2. “Early Polish poetry borrows and reshapes forms and themes from Latin Christian culture.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.
3. “Medieval poetry constantly returns to the theme of death.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.
4. “Polish literature from the Middle Ages gives an insight into relations between social groups.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.

Topic 2: The Golden Age and Sarmatian Culture
1. “Jan Kochanowski’s poems are simultaneously rooted in their historical moment and universal in their themes.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.
2. Discuss some similarities and differences between ONE of Jan Kochanowski’s “songs” or “epigrams” and ONE of his Treny (Laments), considering questions of style, content, tone, mood and worldview.
3. “The Polish Renaissance was both derivative and original.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.
4. “The poetic works of Jan Kochanowski embody a perfect union of form and content.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.
5. “Jan Pasek’s Pamiętniki embody the key aspects of Polish Sarmatian culture.” Discuss.
6. Describe the general worldview of Jan Pasek as expressed in his Pamiętniki.
7. “Jan Pasek’s Pamiętniki offer an unreliable account of historical events and social realities.” Discuss.

Topic 3: Romanticism
1. “After the Third Partition, the Rzeczpospolita disappeared from the map of Europe, but it survived in the minds of its inhabitants.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts from the Romantic period.
2. “The art of the Polish Romantics was not art for art’s sake.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.
3. “Adam Mickiewicz’s national ideology and poetic works include various irresolvable contradictions.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.
4. “Polish Romanticism is essentially a form of literary nationalism.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.
5. “The literature of Polish Romanticism is fundamentally political in nature.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.
6. Discuss Adam Mickiewicz’s representation of the concept of nation with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.
7. Discuss Adam Mickiewicz’s use of folk motifs in TWO OR MORE texts.
**Topic 4: Positivism and Young Poland**
1. “Nineteenth-century Polish realist writing embodied a new spirit of social critique in the wake of failed national uprisings.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE literary works.
2. “Late-nineteenth-century Polish prose writing focuses on symbols rather than realist description.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE literary works.
3. “The philosophy of the late-nineteenth-century Positivist writers lent itself more to prose than to poetry.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE literary works.
4. “Polish prose of the late nineteenth century focuses on society rather than the nation.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE works.
5. “The Young Poland movement was essentially a new incarnation of Romanticism.” Discuss with reference to ONE OR MORE texts and/or paintings.
6. “The Young Poland movement was especially interested in the Polish village and countryside.” Discuss with reference to ONE OR MORE texts and/or paintings.
7. “Key works of the Young Poland movement are fundamentally critical of the movement itself.” Discuss with reference to ONE OR MORE texts and/or paintings.
8. “Stanisław Wyspiański’s The Wedding exposes the fault lines running through Polish society in the late nineteenth century.” Discuss.

**LENT LIST**

**Topic 5: Independent Poland and the Second World War**
1. “The instability of ‘form’ was a central concern in the writings of Bruno Schulz.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.
2. “Nothing is more serious than the absurd.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts by Bruno Schulz.
3. “The stories of Bruno Schulz transform everyday events in a provincial town into a type of mythology.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.
4. “Bruno Schulz’s literary technique is to fill everyday things with unexpected content.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.
5. “Polish writers developed new literary techniques in order to bear witness to the horrors of the Second World War.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.
6. “Polish writing about the Second World War grapples with the fundamental question of what makes a human being in the most extreme conditions.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.
7. “Polish writing about the period of the Second World War raises questions about the meaning of literature in the face of historical catastrophe.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE texts.
8. “The first-person narrator of Tadeusz Borowski’s stories presents himself as both victim and perpetrator.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE stories from This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen.
Topic 6: Communist Poland
1. “The creative development of postwar Polish cinema was closely connected to the changing political situation in the country.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE films.
2. “Postwar Polish cinema both constructs and deconstructs national myths.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE films.
3. “Post-war Polish cinema was torn between political commitment and individual expression.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE films.
4. Compare and contrast Andrzej Wajda’s Generation (Pokolenie, 1954) and Kanal (1957), paying particular attention to the transition from the limitations of socialist realism to freer forms of cinematic expression.
5. “In Polish culture, the poet is the acknowledged legislator of the world.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE poets.
6. “Polish writers developed new literary techniques in order to bear witness to the horrors of the Second World War.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE poets.
7. “Polish poets between 1945 and 1989 found diverse ways to deal with political questions.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE poets.
8. “Postwar Polish poetry is more concerned with ethics than aesthetics.” Discuss with reference to TWO OR MORE poets.

Topic 7: Post-1989 Poland
1. “Olga Tokarczuk’s Prawiek i inne czasy fundamentally explores the nature of time.” Discuss.
2. “Olga Tokarczuk’s Prawiek i inne czasy presents the relationship between human beings and nature in various different ways.” Discuss.
3. “History, family history and myth are interwoven in Olga Tokarczuk’s Prawiek i inne czasy.” Discuss.
4. Discuss the various representations of women and femininity in Olga Tokarczuk’s Prawiek i inne czasy.
5. Discuss the religious or metaphysical themes of Olga Tokarczuk’s Prawiek i inne czasy.

Topic 8: Jews in Poland
1. “The film Ida captures the complexities and later consequences of Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War.” Discuss.
3. “Paweł Pawlikowski’s film Ida uses individual characters to illustrate broader historical events and processes.” Discuss.
4. “Paweł Pawlikowski’s Ida presents significant challenges to contemporary Poles in how they remember the period of the Second World War.” Discuss.
SECTION 4: READING

The following list provides a general guide to available resources. **Students are by no means expected to read everything on the topic lists.** The “Key Readings” are strongly recommended.

[The accompanying audio files may be downloaded for free here: http://www.routledgetextbooks.com/textbooks/colloquial/polish.php]

Czesław Miłosz’s *History of Polish Literature* is the course “textbook,” and you will be expected to read the relevant chapters from it week by week.

**Many of the works on the topic lists are available electronically via the SL13 Moodle site.**

**GENERAL WORKS**


TOPIC 1: PAGAN PRE-HISTORY TO THE MIDDLE AGES

Key Readings


Primary Sources

*Staropolska Online*: [http://www.staropolska.pl/](http://www.staropolska.pl/)

Secondary Sources


TOPIC 2: THE GOLDEN AGE AND SARMATIAN CULTURE

Key Readings

*Golden Age/Renaissance*

Selected poems by Jan Kochanowski – from *Monumenta Polonica*, pp. 135-158.  
*Laments*, by Jan Kochanowski (translated by Stanisław Barańczak and Seamus Heaney).

*Sarmatian Culture/Baroque*

Primary Sources


Staropolska Online: http://www.staropolska.pl/

Secondary Sources


**TOPIC 3: ROMANTICISM**

**Key Readings**

“Book One” of *Pan Tadeusz*, by Adam Mickiewicz ([https://pl.wikisource.org/wiki/Pan_Tadeusz_(wyd._1834) – available here in Polish and English translation].

*Forefather’s Eve, Part III*, by Adam Mickiewicz – in: *Polish Romantic Drama*, edited by Harold B. Segel ([https://pl.wikisource.org/wiki/Dziady/Poema/Cz%C4%99%C5%9B%C4%87_III – only in Polish].

*Księgi narodu polskiego*, by Adam Mickiewicz ([https://pl.wikisource.org/wiki/Ksi%C4%99gi_narodu_polskiego_i_pielgrzymstwa_polskiego – only in Polish].


**Primary Sources**


*Virtual Library of Polish Literature*: http://literat.ug.edu.pl/books.htm

**Secondary Sources**


Koropeczyj, Roman. “Orientalism in Adam Mickiewicz’s Crimean Sonnets.” *The Slavic and
TOPIC 4: POSITIVISM AND YOUNG POLAND

Key Readings

Positivism

“The Lighthouse Keeper of Aspinwall,” by Henryk Sienkiewicz.

Young Poland

Wesele (The Wedding), by Stanisław Wyspiański
(https://pl.wikisource.org/wiki/Wesele_(Wyspia%C5%84ski) – in Polish only).

Primary Sources

https://archive.org/stream/withfireandswor07siengoog#page/n10/mode/2up (open source).

Secondary Sources


TOPIC 5: INDEPENDENT POLAND AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Key Readings

Independent Poland


Second World War

Tadeusz Borowski, This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentleman—“This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen”, “The People who Walked on”, “A World of Stone”.


Primary Sources


**Secondary Sources**


**TOPIC 6: COMMUNIST POLAND**

**Key Readings**

**Poetry**


**Films**


*Man on the Tracks* (*Człowiek na torze*, 1956), directed by Andrzej Munk.

*The Last Day of Summer* (*Ostatni dzień lata*, 1958), directed by Tadeusz Konwicki.

*Knife in the Water* (*Nóż w wodzie*, 1962), directed by Roman Polański.

**Primary Sources**


**Secondary Sources**


**TOPIC 7: CULTURE WARS: POST-1989 POLAND**

**Key Readings**


**Other Primary Sources**

**Secondary Sources**


**TOPIC 8: JEWS IN POLAND**

**Film**

*Ida* (2013) directed by Paweł Pawlikowski

**Secondary Sources**
